Learning outcome one:

Language and style

You are encouraged to explore descriptive language especially the use of adjectives, colour, sensory words and phrases, patterns of imagery and issues of stillness and movement.

Descriptive writing has:

a) *Texture: for example, a smooth surface, or a patched floor, or splintered word etc.*

b) *Colour: for example, pitch dark, gloomy black, etc.*

c) *Structure or shape: this means there is coherency and cohesion in writing, this simply it implies it flows.*

When you are describing,
A shape, or sound, or tint;
Don't state the matter plainly,
But put it in a hint;
And learn to look at all things,
With a sort of mental squint.
~Charles Lutwidge Dodgson (Lewis Carroll)

Learning outcome two:

Working with descriptions

When writing a descriptive piece the writing must leave a clear impression of the subject matter in the reader's mind. The reader must, for example, smell the creamy vanilla pods and not just something sweet. Or the cobalt blue Maserati thundered by with a roar, and not the car sped past. What car? What colour is it? What does it sound like? These all leave the reader with an exact impression of the car that sped by. Descriptive pieces should always bring to life your five senses. The sensory images that are brought to life almost always create a distinct mood or atmosphere that allows the reader to feel what you intended to create by carefully enhancing the experience. It is important to remember that mood is brought about by carefully chosen language and isolated selected detail. Thus, descriptive pieces are not cumbersome; they should not be overloaded with a lot of detail, but rather carefully planned with selected detail and language. One useful strategy for selecting appropriate detail and language is using **WORD BANKS**. These will be discussed extensively in learning outcome three.

The five senses:

All senses must be described VIVIDLY and in many instances FIGURATIVELY:

1. *Sense of sight:*   *What do you see? The sky is never blue; rather, the sky has been painted in shades of grey that echo the moods of the cloud giant…*
2. *Sense of hearing:*   *What do you hear? What sound is being made? Do the jangling keys promise the release from imprisonment?*
3. *Sense of taste:*   *What can you taste? Do remember that it is possible to, taste the foul air…*
4. *Sense of smell:*   *What can you smell? Chocolate certainly doesn't like chocolate – chocolate smells like the decadent cocoa fields…And do remember: you can, indeed, smell fear, and so forth.*
5. *Sense of touch:*   *What does it feel like? His pimpled face felt like a continuous mountain of ascents and descents…*

Do remember that some descriptive pieces draw on personal experience For example, a First Day or Last Day at School and others may describe an emotion or colour, these are abstract pieces and others, still, may draw more on your imagination, for example My Ideal Town.

Do remember the following:

Syntax in descriptive pieces: The type of sentences you use can in themselves assist in creating a mood. For example a simple sentence like, The Silence. - can be just as effective as a compound or complex description of silence. The simple sentence with a capital letter s gives it a quality of its own as though it has taken on a personality.

Mood and atmosphere: Mood and atmosphere is the feeling that is evoked in the reader through descriptions. (Please remember that mood is created by the words and language you choose. Mood and tone are NOT the same concept. Tone is what the writer intends with his writing, for example, a writer intends to be humorous and thus he writes in a funny or humorous way.

Research and resources:

Read through the following links carefully and make additional notes if needs be:

http://www.thewritingsite.org/resources/genre/descriptive.asp

http://www.webenglishteacher.com/descriptive.html

Please click on each heading in the above link and do ALL the exercises under each heading, except the first one entitled Artistic elements.

Student activity:

This exercise is a two-fold activity; it involves seeing an image and then reading a descriptive poem which uses carefully selected language to describe the scene. The two work in tangent and require careful scrutiny to answer the questions:

This painting is based on *La Belle Dame Sans Merci* by John Keats

Sir Frank Dicksee, La Belle Dame sans Merci Date: circa 1902

Look carefully at the picture:

- What clues are there about the dress and appearance of the two characters to suggest what they might be? Describe these as vividly as possible by selecting your language carefully.
- Where do you think they are? Look at the setting. Describe the setting.
- What do you think is happening? Describe the action. Why would the horsed head be bowed? Why would he have his hands spread as they are, etc?
- Who do you think is the stronger of the two; describe how you see through your perception of the painting.

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"La Belle Dame sans Merci"

Oh what can ail thee, knight-at-arms,
Alone and palely loitering?
The sedge has withered from the lake,
And no birds sing.

Oh what can ail thee, knight-at-arms,
So haggard and so woe-begone?
The squirrel's granary is full,
And the harvest's done

I see a lily on thy brow,
With anguish moist and fever-dew,
And on thy cheeks a fading rose
Fast withereth too.

I met a lady in the meads,
Full beautiful - a faery's child,
Her hair was long, her foot was light,
And her eyes were wild.

I made a garland for her head,
And bracelets too, and fragrant zone;
She looked at me as she did love,
And made sweet moan.

I set her on my pacing steed,
And nothing else saw all day long,
For sidelong would she bend, and sing
A faery's song.

She found me roots of relish sweet,
And honey wild, and manna-dew,
And sure in language strange she said -
'I love the true'.

She took me to her elfin grot,
And there she wept and sighed full sore,
And there I shut her wild wild eyes
With kisses four.

And there she lulled me asleep
And there I dreamed - Ah! woes betide! -

The latest dream I ever dreamt
On the cold hill side.

I saw pale kings and princes too,
Pale warriors, death-pale were they all;
They cried - 'La Belle Dame sans Merci
Hath thee in thrall!'

I saw their starved lips in the gloam,
With horrid warning gaped wide,
And I awoke and found me here,
On the cold hill's side.

And this is why I sojourn here
Alone and palely loitering,
Though the sedge is withered from the lake,
And no birds sing.
John Keats - 1819

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Read the poem above entitled, La Belle Dame Sans Merci by John Keats aloud. The title is French and more or less translates as 'The Beautiful Lady without Mercy', though perhaps without 'tenderness' would be more accurate!

- Look at the first three verses and discuss how the knight is described, select all the vocabulary and language that describes him.
- What time of year is it in the poem? What descriptions indicate this?
- Describe the setting the knight finds himself in and also what he looks like. Again select all the relevant descriptions.
- How does the knight describe what the lady did to him?
- Which verse do you think best describes what Sir Frank Dicksee captured in his painting?
- Describe the knight's dream and what happened when he woke.

Now, look at the two again and then;

- Describe the similarities and differences between the two in terms of how they have set about creating a mood inspired by the same subject.

- Which one do you prefer, the painting or the poem and why?